

A Trinity Man Abroad

Sir Winthrop Hackett

Geoffrey Bolton

There was a time when Western Australians remembered the goldrush decade of the 1890s as ruled by a triumvirate of Sir John Forrest, Winthrop Hackett, and Bishop Charles Riley. As one elderly man put it to me: 'Forrest ran the politics, Hackett ran the press, and Riley was minister for junket'. This was never quite the whole story, as Riley did not arrive until 1894, and Forrest had other powerful advisers such as his brother Alexander and Charles Harper; but it reflected the power that influential individuals in strategic roles could exercise in a small community, as well perhaps as the Masonic links between Hackett and Riley. None of the triumvirate has an adequate biography although as I write the publication of Frank Crowley's *magnum opus* on Forrest is imminent. Good short accounts have been written for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* by Lyall Hunt on Hackett and Peter Boyce on Riley, but the bigger studies have yet to come.

In Hackett's case a number of issues remain for clearing up. We are not even sure about the date and place of his birth, although 4 February 1848 is the usual account. More significantly, it is sometimes hard to reconcile the younger Hackett with the elder statesman who was Western Australia's cultural commissar in the twenty years before his death in 1916. The Hackett who appears in the pages of John Poynter's admirable biography of Alexander Leeper¹ is a whimsical, out-at-elbows figure, too fond of a joke, at times almost garrulous, and discreetly flirtatious with the young ladies whom he thought himself too plain and too impoverished to court. The Winthrop Hackett whose bust graced the State Library of Western Australia for many years is a solemn conservative with the *gravitas* suited to a University Chancellor.

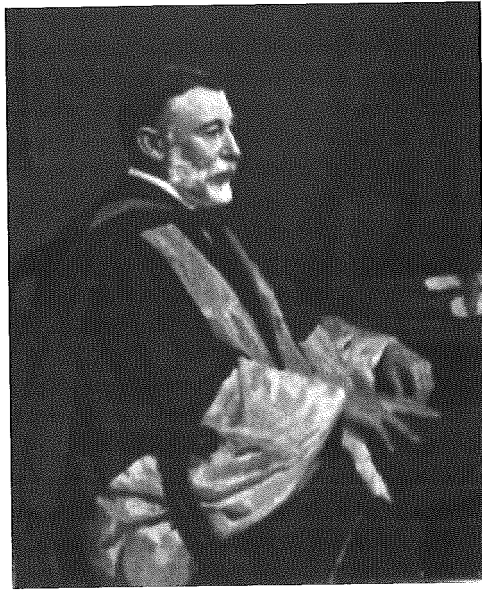
To understand Hackett it is critical to remember that he was an Anglo-Irish protestant with a strong sense of caste. His family were among the Norman invaders of Henry II's reign, and for over six centuries they were settled near Fethard, Co. Tipperary. Great wealth eluded them. Winthrop Hackett's great grandfather was a minor army officer at the time of the 1798 rising. His father was a Church of Ireland clergyman who became vicar of Shankill, south of Dublin. Two of Hackett's sisters married bishops, and two of his younger brothers became clergy, one serving for many years as vicar of Bray. A Dublin legend, which I have not verified, states that the church at Bray was one of the few ecclesiastical buildings to be destroyed by either side during the troubles of the early 1920s. Apparently it was believed to contain a baptismal register recording the christening according to the rites of the Protestant Church of Ireland of a child named Eamon de Valera. This was the closest that the Hacketts who remained in Ireland approached historical importance.²

John Winthrop Hackett—he always used the second name—emerged from obscurity as an undergraduate enrolling at Trinity College, Dublin in 1866. Academically he was not very distinguished, eventually graduating with second class honours.³ He was however prominent in the Historical Society, Trinity's long-established debating society, and showed some taste for amateur theatricals despite the handicap of a disfigured left eye. His student years coincided with the suppression of the Fenian movement in the late 1860s and Gladstone's legislation to disestablish the Church of Ireland and improve the conditions of agricultural tenants. It is probably no coincidence that Hackett in maturity upheld law and order against popular radicalism, supported projects for settling agriculturalists on the land in Western Australia, and strongly opposed state aid to religious bodies.

After graduating (B.A., 1871 and M.A., 1874) Hackett qualified as a barrister in 1874. But in the stagnant Dublin of that era there was little intellectual excitement and less opportunity for advancement in the legal profession. Like many a young Anglo-Irishman before him, Hackett decided to improve his fortunes by emigration. He chose Australia, probably because his closest friend at Trinity, Alexander Leeper, also a clergyman's son, had been hospitably received during a visit to Sydney and was planning to return. Leeper had been keeping company with one of the daughters of (Sir) George Wigram Allen, a rich cabinet minister and property developer, and gave Hackett an introduction to the family. When Hackett arrived in 1875 he did not make such a good impression. Leeper's fiancée complained that he talked incessantly and was 'frivolous and superficial', while her sister thought him 'the rudest young man you ever saw'.⁴ It was not the last time that friends would criticise his habit of making jokes. When Leeper, then in Melbourne, tackled him about it, Hackett replied: 'Do not condemn my sunny heart, for it is at present all that I have'.⁵

It was too true. Sydney was producing plenty of able young lawyers from among its own university graduates, such as Edmund Barton and Richard O'Connor, and there was little business to share with an impecunious newcomer. Hackett ran the risk of being cast into a stereotype common at that time, the amiable, shiftless young remittance man, condemned to bachelorhood through lack of means, repaying free meals with amusing company and good conversation, but ultimately without prospects. Many men, Leeper's brother among them, succumbed to these pressures and took to drink or an unfortunate marriage, or both. In Hackett's case, sensitivity about his personal appearance—he was a short scrawny young man with a squint—must also have sapped his self-confidence. Hackett did not go under. His sense of humour provided one survival mechanism; perhaps even more, so did his sense of caste.

Rescue came early in 1876 when Leeper was appointed warden of the University of Melbourne's recently established Anglican residential college, which by a happy omen was named Trinity. This reflected the influence of an older generation of Anglo-Irish lawyers, notably Sir Redmond Barry and Sir William Stawell, who having emigrated to Victoria in time for the great gold discoveries of the 1850s, figured in their years of prosperity as patrons of the arts and learning in the colony. Leeper invited Hackett to take up the position of sub-warden. The job carried no stipend, but offered free board and lodging, and Hackett accepted. He was to remain as Leeper's right-hand man for six years, during which Trinity established itself securely. Evidently he earned his keep. College tradition remembers student rowdiness late at night calmed by the appearance of the sub-warden in his nightshirt, with a polite: 'Gentlemen, moderate



Sir Winthrop Hackett as founding Chancellor of the University of Western Australia. The posthumous portrait, painted by W.B. McInnes from photographs, shows Hackett wearing the robes of his alma mater, Trinity College, Dublin. By courtesy, St George's College, University of Western Australia.

your transports.⁶ He was a prime mover behind the decision that the Trinity students should stage a play in Latin, a venture never previously attempted in Australia. The work chosen was the *Mostellaria* of Plautus, a writer of comedies in the second century B.C. Otherwise known as *The Haunted House*, the play is a knockabout farce in which a rich merchant returning from a long absence overseas finds his household a scene of riot and disorder, but is hoodwinked by a clever serving-man whose schemes and taradiddles keep the action moving. Hackett played the heavy father, Theopropides.

Politics also intrigued Hackett. At this time the liberal premier Graham Berry had come into collision with a Legislative Council dominated by conservative property-owners. The conflict lasted from 1877 to 1880 against a background of social unrest reflected in the exploits of the Kelly gang. Ironically, in view of his later career in Western Australia, Hackett was a strong partisan of Berry's reform movement. At the elections of February 1880, for no very obvious reason, he stood for the Legislative Assembly seat of Normanby, based on Casterton, as an advanced Liberal. He polled ignominiously, and in an era of first-past-the post voting his intervention helped to unseat the sitting Liberal member and let in a Conservative. Political instability continued, and at another general election held in July 1880 Hackett came forward as the sole Liberal candidate for Sandridge (now Port Melbourne). He fared much better, and in a poll of over 1,500 voters came close to defeating Dr John Madden (later Sir John and Chief Justice of Victoria).⁷ Had he succeeded, he probably would have remained in Victoria as a colleague of Alfred Deakin, although in an era before payment of members his personal finances would still have been a problem. As it was, past thirty years of age and without a secure future, he began to look a little desperately for opportunities elsewhere in Australia.

He chose Western Australia. Neglected and isolated during its first fifty years, the colony was coming to the notice of Melbourne investors after the opening of the Kimberley district in 1879. In 1883 Hackett went to 'Wooramel', a sheep station in the Gascoyne district, about 1,000 kilometres north of Perth. The Gascoyne, based on the recently opened port of Carnarvon, was still frontier country where pastoralists and Aborigines clashed violently. At the time of Hackett's arrival a resident magistrate, Robert Fairbairn, was appointed to the district with the aim of convicting the Aboriginal ringleaders and sentencing them to removal to the penal settlement at Rottnest Island. He and his successor, C. D. Foss, stretched their powers beyond the limit, but the Gascoyne pastoralists approved this strong action, and the new-chum Hackett absorbed their attitude. He himself at least once ordered the flogging of an Aboriginal. He did not last many months in the Gascoyne, and was soon back in Perth, his prospects seeming worse than ever.⁸

Then his luck turned, and late in 1883 he was taken on as business manager for the owners of one of Perth's daily newspapers, the *West Australian*. Founded only four years after European settlement in 1829, the *West Australian* had undergone several changes of name and ownership before falling into the hands of a consortium whose leading members were Charles Harper and Sir Thomas Cockburn-Campbell. Both were a few years older than Hackett, members of the Legislative Council of conservative temper. Harper was colonial-born, a clergyman's son who invested shrewdly in pastoral and town properties, cool and phlegmatic in all matters except his zeal for agricultural improvement. Cockburn-Campbell, Western Australia's only baronet at that time, was a cultivated melancholic who acted as editor.⁹ Hackett found that he could work well with them and before long was absorbing many of their conservative and distinctively Western Australian values, and increasingly helping Cockburn-Campbell on the editorial side.

The *West Australian* faced competition from the *Daily News* and the *Inquirer*, owned by the Stirling Brothers from a long-established local family, but from the first Hackett and his colleagues behaved as if their newspaper was destined for pre-eminence. In 1885 they launched a weekly journal, the *Western Mail*, summarising the week's reports from the *West Australian* and adding material designed for a rural readership, especially the latest developments in agricultural technology. This gave them an edge over their rivals just at the moment when Western Australia was entering on a boom, at first from pastoral and railway investment, then more dramatically from the gold discoveries that began in 1886. In 1887 Hackett succeeded Cockburn-Campbell as editor, and from that time became one of the proprietors of the newspaper, sharing co-ownership with Harper. Hackett would have been well aware of the power that a metropolitan daily could wield in shaping opinion in an Australian colony. David Syme of the Melbourne *Age* was a prime example of a media owner credited with ability to make or unmake politicians. Other examples could be found in the Fairfaxes of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and their editor Andrew Garran, or Hackett's contemporary, John Lavington Bonython of the *Adelaide Advertiser*.¹⁰

Hackett's early ventures into public controversy showed a partisan zeal which at times verged on the reckless. In August 1885 he satirised speculators in real estate promoting a subdivision at Bayswater so keenly that they sued for libel. The chief justice, Alexander Campbell Onslow, summed up somewhat in the plaintiffs' favour, but the jury awarded them the contemptuous damages of a farthing; a few cents in today's purchasing power.

In 1885 the Anglican Church appointed a missionary to the Gascoyne district, John

Brown Gribble, who within a few months aroused the fury of the local pastoralists by attacking their treatment of the Aborigines. Next year Gribble publicised his allegations in *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land*. The failed Gascoyne squatter Hackett defended his ex-neighbours in an editorial describing Gribble as a 'lying canting humbug'. Gribble sued Harper and Hackett for libel, claiming damages of £10,000. The case was heard by two judges, Onslow and his junior colleague E.A. Stone, who in June 1887 found in favour of the *West Australian* and against Gribble. Hackett was already prominent as a churchwarden of St. George's Cathedral and synodsmen, and his influence probably contributed to Bishop Parry's failure to support his turbulent priest.

The *West Australian* was also a staunch supporter of Sir Frederick Napier Broome, the able but irascible governor of Western Australia from 1883 to 1889. Confronted with a growing demand for self-government, Broome managed to quarrel with several of his senior officials including Chief Justice Onslow, Attorney-General, Alfred Hensman, and to a less extent the locally-born Surveyor-General, John Forrest. They favoured the grant of responsible government, and were backed by the *Inquirer*, leaving the *West Australian* to follow the conservative line. (This reflected Harper's influence as senior partner. Hackett personally favoured self-government.)

In September 1887 Broome forbade Onslow to exercise office as Chief Justice, thus polarising opinion further. At a by-election for the Perth seat in May 1888 Hensman and other supporters of Onslow favoured the candidature of John Horgan, a recently arrived Irish lawyer who gained a name for radicalism by denouncing the 'six hungry families' who allegedly dominated the colony. The *West Australian* backed his opponent, Septimus Burt, but to the dismay of the Anglo-Irish protestant Hackett, Horgan won a heavy poll by three votes.¹¹

Although Hensman had been Hackett's counsel during the Gribble case the robustly fought by-election alienated them. Hensman applauded when Horgan denounced the *West Australian* as a 'reptile sheet ... The embodiment of lies, distortion, snobbery, and low journalism' and Hackett editorially accused Hensman of 'misrepresentation, misquotation, and false accusation.' Hensman sued the newspaper. The case was heard by Onslow, now restored as chief justice. He found in favour of Hensman and awarded substantial damages. This experience further cooled Hackett's liberalism. Even the sympathetic Governor Broome wrote: 'Mr Hackett has more than once injured his case by indiscretion and hesitation,' but added '... in opinion of this community Mr Harper and Mr Hackett are honourable and conscientious gentlemen.'¹²

Harper and Hackett petitioned the Legislative Council and the Colonial Office against the bias allegedly shown by Chief Justice Onslow on this and other occasions. An official inquiry in January 1889 ended inconclusively, but later the Legislative Council by ten votes to seven censured Onslow.¹³ John Forrest was moved to dispatch a long memorandum to the Colonial Office. The *West Australian*, he wrote, 'desires to rule Western Australia'. Further:

Mr Hackett is not only 'indiscreet' but also unreliable; one who is given to random statements and unworthy insinuations, to 'joking' about serious questions ... Mr Hackett has been in the Colony but a few years, and ... has no right to be considered a prominent colonist.¹⁴

This did not prevent Forrest from attempting to act as peacemaker with Hackett. Hackett appreciated the gesture, but thought it of no use as 'Onslow would break out'.¹⁵ Eventually the imbroglio was settled by Onslow taking leave for over a year. During that time governor Broome retired and self-government was granted, so that on Onslow's return the unpleasantness had died down.

Lyall Hunt speculates that these episodes taught Hackett the wisdom of promoting consensus and harmony in the West Australian community, and this seems probable.¹⁶ Already Hackett was moving towards the middle ground. He joined the Refrom Association which had pressed for responsible government, and in December 1890 editorially welcomed the commissioning of Forrest as first premier. This had its reward. The first parliament was to consist of thirty members of the Legislative Assembly elected by the voters, and fifteen nominees to the Legislative Council who would hold office until Western Australia's population reached 60,000, after which members would be elected on a franchise restricted to property-holding males. Fourteen legislative councillors were named before Forrest's ministry was sworn in. At its first meeting on 29 December 1890 it named a fifteenth: Hackett. Despite his habit of 'joking', Forrest evidently saw enough solidity in Hackett to make him worth cultivating as an ally.

Hackett's luck held when the new parliament had to choose seven delegates to attend the Federal Convention in Sydney in March 1891. The leader of the opposition, S.H. Parker, could not participate because of professional commitments and Hackett was one of the few available legally qualified substitutes. He made an impact at the Convention by a speech in which he urged that the Senate, as representing the states, should enjoy co-equal powers with the House of Representatives. Hackett coined an often-quoted phrase: 'either responsible government will kill Federation or Federation, in the form in which we shall, I hope, be prepared to accept it, will kill responsible government.'¹⁷ His forecast did not come true during the first hundred years of Federation, but it encapsulated the fears of many in the smaller colonies. As Hackett reported to Edmund Barton a few weeks after the Convention, only Forrest among the leading Western Australians favoured federation in any shape or form. In most quarters, the feeling against it amounted 'almost to frenzy'.¹⁸

He returned to Western Australia by way of Victoria, and this may have stirred a momentary restlessness in him, as in May 1891 he wrote to Leeper: 'am I to pursue my projects here? I have got many and I am sure that I can make them succeed.'¹⁹ He did well to stay in the West, as the colony was poised on the brink of a goldrush boom which would last the decade, whereas Victoria was about to tumble from a boom based on land speculation into a prolonged slump.

In the Legislative Council, Hackett's readiness in debate soon brought him to the fore. Often he was found seconding legislation brought forward by the government leader in the upper house. Not that he was growing docile. In December 1892 he was quick to take offence when S.H. Parker, then Colonial Secretary, accused the *West Australian* of ethically dubious advertising practices.²⁰

Hackett seems never to have been tempted to enter the Legislative Assembly. Instead he valued the Legislative Council as a house of dispassionate review. Although to the day of his death he thought of himself as an 'advanced radical,' and was ahead of most of his contemporaries in favouring votes for women, he was happiest as a watchdog against democratic excess. When the time came in 1893 for the Legislative Council to be converted into an elected chamber, Hackett took a part in strengthening the Council's powers as against the more popularly elected Assembly.²¹ At the 1894 elections he became one of the members for South-West Province, and was untroubled to hold the seat for the rest of his life. It was said in his obituary that he more than once refused cabinet rank, believing such office incompatible with the independence required of a newspaperman. This is most likely to have happened when Parker resigned in 1894, but it was not through office-holding that Hackett derived his

influence and his usefulness to Sir John Forrest.

Increasingly he was seen as Forrest's henchman, perhaps even his mentor. The *West Australian* steadfastly supported Forrest's drive to open up the inland for agriculture, including a Homestead Act introduced in 1892 and passed the next year, and the creation of the Agricultural Bank in 1894. In the face of much carping criticism he threw the newspaper's whole-hearted backing behind C.Y. O'Connor's scheme to construct a pipeline from Mundaring Weir to the eastern goldfields. If it was his partner Charles Harper who chaired Forrest's Bureau of Agriculture and who led the movement for improved forestry, it was Hackett who wrote the editorials mobilising public support for these initiatives. Without such staunch media support it might have been difficult even for so masterful a politician as Forrest to sell his bold developmental policies to the voters.

In one respect Hackett may have been a source of embarrassment to Forrest. From 1892 he began a three year campaign in the *West Australian* to secure the abolition of government aid to church schools. Between 1866 and 1880 all the other Australian colonies had opted for free, secular and compulsory education, often with a good deal of sectarian rancour. Western Australia with its small population and limited resources chose to abide by the compromise of 1871, under which government schools co-existed with church schools receiving an annual government grant. This compromise Hackett was determined to undo. No doubt his views were shaped partly by his experience in Victoria and partly by a concern for educational standards in government schools, but his Irish Protestant background and Masonic connections also prejudiced him towards a measure which would embarrass Catholic schools. At a time when massive immigration was bringing educational resources under strain Hackett's crusade was particularly unwelcome to the Catholic Church. Forrest himself did not share Hackett's enthusiasm. He was comfortable with the *status quo*, and went to some trouble to be on good terms with the Catholic community and their leader, Bishop Matthew Gibney.

The Church of England was also a beneficiary under the dual system of 1871 and Hackett's first concern was to win his fellow Anglicans into supporting abolition. He was probably helped by the death in 1893 of Bishop Parry, who had grown accustomed to the *status quo*, and welcomed the arrival next year of the new bishop, his fellow Mason Charles Riley. Partly reflecting recent immigration from Victoria and South Australia, the 1894 elections increased the number of members of parliament favouring abolition, and in 1895 Hackett's cause triumphed. It was followed in 1896 by the appointment of Cyril Jackson as Western Australia's first professional Director of Education, and by the complete adoption of free, secular and compulsory education in 1899. Hackett could not claim to be the sole architect of the new policy, but his powerful advocacy in the *West Australian* certainly gave it impetus.

Hackett's influence on education and culture in Western Australia was not merely negative. For many years he was chairman of the board of the Perth High School (late Hale School), the colony's leading secondary school at a time when private foundations such as Guildford Grammar and Scotch were as yet in their infancy. He was among the citizens whose initiative fostered the establishment of the Victoria Public Library (later the State Library of Western Australia) in 1889 and the Western Australian Museum in 1895, serving as chairman of the library's trustees and inviting J. S. Batty to take up office in 1894 for what would prove a sixty-year stint as State Librarian. He was chairman of the Acclimatisation Society, based on a Victorian model and seeking to introduce new fauna and flora into Western Australia. He is credited with

persuading Forrest to authorise the establishment of zoological gardens at South Perth—and of course became chairman, selected Ernest Le Soeuf as director, and applauded the introduction of kookaburras into Western Australia. The arrival of these essentially Australian birds might be seen not merely ministering to 't'othersider' nostalgia, but also as symbolising Western Australia's oneness with the rest of the continent. Hackett's conduct on the Federation question, however, makes it unlikely that he had any such symbolism in mind.

After his return from the 1891 Convention he was given to describing himself as one of the few supporters of Federation in Western Australia, and until the arrival of goldrush migrants this may have been true enough. He was always clear that the Australian Commonwealth must be a federation respectful of state rights, and unlike most of his fellow-delegates supported the 1891 compromise which enabled the Senate to reject legislation or to suggest changes, but not to impose alterations. By 1897 he seems to have been growing less certain. His views at that time are difficult to assess, since his two most important contributions in that year were made by his absences at crucial moments.

In January 1897 he was one of four Western Australian delegates attending the Federal Council in Hobart. This body, set up in 1885, lacked the membership of New South Wales or New Zealand—or, for much of the time, South Australia,—but it had provided a forum for negotiating agreements between the member colonies, and some thought that it might be upgraded to provide an alternative to the federal parliament proposed under the draft constitution of 1891. The Queensland delegates to the Federal Council proposed that in future members of the Federal Council should be elected rather than nominated by the colonial parliaments, as this would give it greater legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Western Australia agreed. As Brian de Garis comments: 'It seems likely ... that the two colonies which were most hesitant about proceeding towards a more complete Federation were primarily interested in establishing ... an alternative.'²² With one Tasmanian supporter, the Queensland and Western Australian delegations seemed likely to outnumber the remaining Tasmanians and the South Australians. Their success would have cast difficulties in the way of the second Federal Convention scheduled to meet in March 1897. But at the critical vote Hackett was absent. The numbers were tied, and under the Federal Council's rules, the motion was lost. Without openly contradicting his colleagues, Hackett managed to sabotage a proposal which might have impeded the Federation movement.

The Western Australian parliament then turned to select ten delegates for the Convention. Of all the candidates Hackett was the only one to publish a manifesto setting out his views on Federation, and he was duly selected. At the convention he was placed on the constitutional sub-committee, and there voted with his fellow-Western Australians in favour of overthrowing the 1891 compromise in favour of giving the Senate equal powers with the House of Representatives.

When this recommendation came before the full convention, George Reid of New South Wales moved for the restoration of the 1891 formula, undeterred by Forrest's cheerful proclamation: 'We have a majority, we have a large majority.' But when the vote was taken, Hackett was not there, allegedly on the grounds of 'urgent private business.' He was the only absentee for this crucial vote. As it happened, the lobbyists for Reid's motion swayed enough Tasmanians to win without Hackett's support; but, coming after his earlier unexplained absence at the Federal Council it is odd that he missed this critical vote.²³

In the Western Australian parliamentary debates at which the first session of the

Convention was reported, Hackett took the lead in the Legislative Council (since Wittenoon, the government minister in the Council had not attended the convention). He was presented the delegation's performance as a largely successful battle to maintain the rights of the smaller colonies, and explained their relatively modest contribution to debate by pointing out that they had not come to make or to listen to long speeches, but to take significant decisions. 'That the small colonies made such a good fight and secured such good terms was due in the main to the stand made by Western Australia.'²⁴

All this may have been intended to encourage continued Western Australian interest in the Federal question, but during the later sessions of the Convention Hackett grew increasingly dubious about the economic impact of closer union on Western Australia. In the abstract, Federation was desirable, but it would serve Western Australian interests to take time for the economic development resulting from the goldrush, and so to negotiate with the rest of Australia from a more equitable footing at a later date. In May 1898 he wrote to Deakin, explaining that the West needed to 'strengthen our position, and consolidate our embryo industries, either in the farm, the orchard, or the town.'²⁵ Federation might suit the other colonies, but for Western Australia it would bring 'little but evil, for some years forward.' Maybe he was influenced by his partner Charles Harper, who in his concern for Western Australia's primary industries was a vehement anti-Federationist. Hackett's defection left Forrest with few supporters from his own side in politics in advocating Federation.

Through the tumultuous changes of the 1890s, the *West Australian* succeeded in consolidating its status as the colony's leading newspaper. In 1891 the format was expanded to eight pages, each with eight columns. The eruption of the goldrushes brought potential competition, since the newcomers to Western Australia included a number of vigorously irreverent young journalists: Fred Vosper, jailed for sedition at Charters Towers; John Kirwan, early respected as a mining spokesman; and the intellectual Hal Colebatch from a Broken Hill background.²⁶ Nearly all preferred to make their start on the goldfields, where they could be assured of a quickly expanding and sympathetic readership. The *West Australian* consolidated its position by keeping abreast of new technology, moving into new premises in 1896 and introducing linotype in 1898.²⁷ Perth's other daily paper, the *Daily News*, tended to pitch its appeal to a more down-market readership, and the two papers co-existed more or less comfortably.

A stronger challenge appeared at the beginning of 1896 in the shape of a revived *Morning Herald*. Although its chairman of directors was Alexander Forrest the *Morning Herald* was regarded as a 't'othersider' newspaper, aiming to find readership among the newcomers who chafed at the paternalism of Sir John Forrest's regime and saw Hackett's publication as too closely allied with Forrest. A more strident competitor appeared at the end of 1897, when Vosper moved down from the goldfields to start the *Sunday Times* with a style of pungent journalism largely modelled on John Norton's *Truth*. Uninhibitedly the *Sunday Times* attacked the characters of the old 'sandgroper' hierarchy whom it saw as dominating Western Australia under Forrest's leadership, and Hackett was among its targets.

Thanks partly to the success of the *Western Mail* in rural districts, Hackett and Harper fended off these challenges to remain the leaders of the Western Australian press. It also helped that, whereas the directors of the *Morning Herald* paid their shareholders large dividends, Harper and Hackett steadfastly ploughed most of their profits back into improved technology, so that the 20th century found the *West Australian* able to produce 24,000 copies in an hour—a quantity doubled by the time of Hackett's death.²⁸

None of Perth's four major newspapers favoured Federation—the *Sunday Times* because the constitution was insufficiently democratic, and the others because of potential harm to Western Australia's economy—and it was left to the goldfields press to promote the cause. Kirwan of the *Kalgoorlie Miner* took the lead in 1899 in publicising the notion that the goldfields might secede from Western Australia in order to join the new Federation.²⁹ This campaign has been credited with forcing Forrest's hand so that after much resistance he consented to hold a referendum in July 1900 which enabled Western Australians to vote 'Yes' in time to join the Commonwealth on 1 January 1901. Two months before the referendum, despite Harper's continuing opposition, Hackett brought back the *West Australian* to supporting Federation, and several commentators have suggested that he had been moved by fear that the goldfields might indeed secede.³⁰ Since the British government never encouraged the secession movement, it is more likely that Hackett, like Forrest, recognised that Western Australia would be better served by joining the Commonwealth as an original member than by standing out for improved terms which might never materialise. On the night of the referendum it was evident that the *West Australian* was backing the right horse. The 'Yes' vote triumphed by 44,800 votes to 19,691, a signboard outside the newspaper office proclaiming the latest figures for all to see.

Forrest transferred to federal politics at the beginning of 1901. Before departure he recommended a number of his closest associates for Imperial honours. The Colonial Office made difficulties about the grant of a knighthood for Hackett because it was thought that the award of titles to newspaper proprietors could be seen as a form of bribery. Forrest pushed the point, and in 1902 the British authorities consented; but Hackett refused. His obituary states that 'he declined the honour, which as a bachelor had little attraction for him', but a letter from Forrest to the British Secretary of State for Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, shows this story as false. Hackett, wrote Forrest, had been bothering him for years, but refused because he was offered only the lowest order of knighthood, and not a KCMG. 'One should not look a gift horse in the mouth', commented Forrest.³¹ In 1911, several years after Hackett's marriage, the offer was renewed and this time accepted, and in 1913 promotion to KCMG followed. It would be unjust to blame Lady Hackett for an episode which reflects Hackett's enduring sense of Anglo-Irish caste. Hackett was never on such close terms with later Western Australian premiers as he had enjoyed with Forrest, but he exercised great influence as an elder statesman.

In 1903 he was among the leaders of the resistance when Walter James attempted to liberalise the Legislative Council franchise, and between 1911 and 1916 he played an active part in ensuring that the first effective Labor government under John Scaddan failed to implement much of its more controversial legislation. If his politics were growing more reactionary with age, in other respects he was mellowing. Perth gossips were intrigued when in August 1905, aged fifty-seven, the apparently confirmed bachelor Hackett married seventeen year old Deborah Drake Brockman, but the results were happy. Hackett in the last decade of his life enjoyed his domesticity, which came in time to include four daughters and a son. His wife filled her role as chatelaine and hostess with a skill which eventually enabled her, shortly after Hackett's death, to edit a large volume on cookery and household management, which became essential for a generation of Western Australian housewives.³² With her he spent more time at his country investments, a cattle property at Dinninup and a South-West orchard, both maintained more as hobby farms than money making ventures. They travelled widely and entertained lavishly.

Hackett was prospering. His newspaper's major competitor, the *Morning Herald* went out of business in January 1909. Purchased as an investment by Bishop Gibney, the *Morning Herald* sought to discourage gambling by publishing no racing news, a decision which was widely held to have hastened its end. The *West Australian* profited from its advertising revenue, although Harper continued to fear that a new and more business-like competitor might take advantage of Hackett's habit of imposing no fixed tariff for advertising rates but charging whatever he thought appropriate. He avoided industrial trouble by giving generous terms to the Australian Journalists' Association, and was credited as being the first newspaper proprietor to pay salaries based on grades defined on experience. Geoffrey Burgoyne, a young journalist arriving from Adelaide in 1911, was astonished at the easy going, unhurried pace of routine at the *West Australian*. He also noted that Hackett's editorials 'were fine examples of subtlety, so much so that it was not always easy to determine whether the opinion was pro or con' and that 'Highly contentious issues, unless unavoidable, were taboo'. In 1912 Harper died, and Hackett purchased his share of the firm from his family for £88,000, shortly after converting to a public company.³³ Hackett of course remained unquestionably in charge. Except for health problems, he seemed at the zenith of his fortunes.

Increasingly his energies were occupied with the promotion of Western Australia's cultural institutions. Already chairman of the committee overseeing the Public Library, he succeeded Sir James Lee Steere as chairman of the Museum trustees in 1904, overseeing the construction of new buildings for both institutions. In 1911 the library, museum, and art gallery were placed under joint trustees, Hackett remaining chairman until his death. The great enthusiasm of his later years was the creation of a university. Since his arrival in Western Australia he used his newspapers to stress the necessity of a 'coping-stone' for the colony's educational system, making much of the trouble and expense involved in sending students to eastern Australia or overseas. Despite his differences with Walter James he spoke strongly in favour of the premier's scheme in 1903-04 to set aside outer suburban land with growth potential as an endowment for a university, and urged the case of those who could not afford to go interstate for tertiary education. In 1909 he was appointed chairman of a strong royal commission which, not surprisingly, recommended in favour of the early establishment of a university.³⁴ Naturally Hackett was chairman of the planning body and first chancellor. The enabling legislation was passed in 1911, and in 1913 the University of Western Australia enrolled its first students in makeshift quarters in the centre of Perth.

Hackett thoroughly deserves his reputation as the University of Western Australia's founding father. Younger men who shared in its planning remembered him with admiration forty years later, although one added that Hackett was 'one of the worst chairman I have sat under'.³⁵ Surprisingly, and in this he differed from that earlier Anglo-Irish patron of a university, Sir Redmond Barry, at Melbourne, Hackett was no believer in replicating old-world universities in a new environment. As he told the Legislative Council: 'I believe that the influence of Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin has been largely mischievous so far as the new countries of the Empire are concerned.'³⁶ When it came to endowing a chair out of his considerable wealth, Hackett chose agriculture as an essential discipline in Western Australia. He also gave a chair of geology priority over classics, though in the end money was found for both.

His most startling departure from tradition came in his insistence the University of Western Australia should not charge tuition fees. It took his casting vote to force through the decision, but for a half a century Western Australia was to remain unique

among the English-speaking world as 'a free university', and the distinction was a proud boast for many of the state's citizens. Hackett believed that students on low incomes should not be discouraged by added financial burdens.³⁷ He would have scorned the 'user pays' principle, which holds that an education is valueless unless it results in debt. There may have been something of the magnanimity of the Anglo-Irish tradition at its best in his attitude. Around the same time W. B. Yeats back in Dublin was lampooning the wealthy men who would not support an art gallery until it was proved that the people wanted pictures:

What cared Duke Ercole, that bid
His mummers to the market-place
What th' onion-sellers thought or did
So that his Plautus set the pace
For the Italian comedies?
And Guidobaldo, when he made
That grammar school of courtesies
Where wit and beauty learned their trade
Upon Urbino's windy hill,
Had sent no runners to and fro
That he might learn the shepherds' will.³⁸

Hackett's philanthropy and spacious planning were set in a Perth unaccustomed to the concept that the rich should contribute to their community. As he wrote to Alfred Deakin, 'It is quite incredible how mean people can be, how one-sided, and how directly regardless of what is needed over such a business' as establishing a university.³⁹

He had the last word when he made his will. After providing amply for his family, Hackett left the residue of his estate to the university, making provision for the erection of an Anglican residential college (the future St. George's) and endowing postgraduate scholarships to enable Western Australians to undertake advanced study overseas. (I was a beneficiary; I am grateful). It was a model of public philanthropy without precedent in Western Australia, although its full extent was not realised until ten years after Hackett's death, and the gift owed much to the careful stewardship of Hackett's friend and executor, Sir Alfred Langler.

Despite his ill health and the onset of Parkinson's disease, Hackett was still energetically at work when he died somewhat unexpectedly on a Saturday morning, 19 February 1916. This afforded time for Monday morning's edition of the *West Australian* to be set up with black borders of mourning between its columns, and to commemorate its editor-proprietor with seemly obituary articles and tributes from leading public figures all over Australia. The funeral was conducted on Monday afternoon with full Masonic honours, though the undertakers, Bowra & O'Dea, traditionally catered for a Catholic clientele. Even in his passing there was an element of paradox about Hackett.⁴⁰

Winthrop Hackett is overdue for a full biography, but he covered his tracks during his lifetime, and it would be difficult nearly a century later to penetrate his reticences. A biographer would need to trace the process of maturation through which the partisan journalist of the 1880s became a prime architect of ruling-class consensus in the Western Australia of Forrest and beyond. A historian of the Federation movement might well be baffled by the shifts and intricacies of Hackett's views on the question, and not least by his two unexplained absences from critical votes in 1897. This much may be said for him: that, arriving in Australia with many of the sectarian prejudices of old Ireland heavy upon him, he eventually promoted a concept of education and society suited to the needs of the Australian environment, to the enduring benefit of his adopted community.

REFERENCES

- 1 J.R. Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties: A Life of Alexander Leeper*, Melbourne, 1997.
- 2 Sir John Hackett, interviewed by author, 5 December, 1995; anecdote heard in Dublin, August 1956.
- 3 F. Alexander, *Campus at Crawley*, Perth, 1963, p.18.
- 4 Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties.*, pp.49, 55.
- 5 Ibid., p.56.
- 6 Ibid., p.72.
- 7 Age, 1 March, 5 July, 16 July 1880.
- 8 *West Australian*, 1 December, 1882; N. Green and S. Moon, *Far from Home, Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottne Island 1838-1931*, Dictionary of Western Australians, vol. X, Perth, 1997, pp.46-7.
- 9 J.S. Battye, 'W.A. News', unpublished typescript held in the Battye Papers, Battye Library of Western Australian History.
- 10 G. Souter, *Company of Heralds: A Century and a Half of Australian Publishing by John Fairfax Limited and Its Predecessors, 1831-1981*, 2nd edition, Sydney, 1991; C.E. Sayers, *David Syme: A Life*, Melbourne, 1965.
- 11 C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth*, Perth, 1980, pp. 199-204.
- 12 J.S. Battye, *Western Australia, A History: From Its Discovery to the Inauguration of the Commonwealth*, Oxford, 1924, ch. 7.
- 13 WALCV&P, 1888, A 1; 1889, Paper 4, *Western Australian Legislative Council Debates*, vol. 16, pp.59-90, 309-35.
- 14 F.K. Crowley, *Forrest, 1847-1918*, vol. 1, Brisbane, 1971, p.205.
- 15 Ibid., p.207.
- 16 *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, p.150.
- 17 *Official Record of Proceedings and Debates of the Australasian Federation Conference*, Sydney, 1891, p.280.
- 18 Hackett to Barton, 7 May, 1891, Barton Papers, National Library of Australia [NLA] MS 51/71.
- 19 Hackett to Leeper, 14 May, 1891, cited by Poynter, *Doubts and Certainties*, p.189.
- 20 *Parliamentary Debates of Western Australia [WAPD]*, vol. 3, pp.424-25.
- 21 Ibid., vol. 4, pp.436-42, 621.
- 22 B. de Garis, 'Western Australia', in H. Irving (ed.), *The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation*, Melbourne, 1999, pp. 294-95.
- 23 Ibid., p.297; J.A. La Nauze, *The Making of The Australian Constitution*, Melbourne, 1972, pp. 147-48; G.C. Bolton, 'The Western Australians: a silent majority', *New Federalist*, 1, 1998.
- 24 WAPD, vol. 10, pp.104-05.
- 25 Hackett to Deakin, 23 May, 1898, Deakin Papers, NLA MSS 1540, cited by de Garis, 'Western Australia', p.303.
- 26 *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol 8, pp.64-65 (Colebatch), vol.9, pp.624-26 (Kirwan); vol.12, pp.374-75 (Vosper).
- 27 Battye, *Western Australia*, ch. 9.
- 28 Ibid., ch.10.
- 29 J.S. Bastin, 'The Western Australian Separation for Federation movement', *Australian Quarterly*, vol. 27, 1, 1955, pp.77-80; Sir John Kirwan, 'How Western Australia Joined the Commonwealth', *Early Days* [Journal and Proceedings, Royal Western Australian Historical Society], vol. IV, 2, pp.21-25.

- 30 *West Australian*, 5 January, 1933, Battye, *Western Australia*, p.451; but see also, de Garis, 'Western Australia', pp.309-16, with which I agree.
- 31 Memorandum re honours, n.d.; Forrest to Chamberlain, 24 November 1902, Chamberlain MSS, University of Birmingham, 13/1/15 and 17/2/05; see also, *West Australian*, 21 February 1916.
- 32 Lady Hackett (ed.), *The Australian Household Guide*, Perth, 1916, 1136pp.
- 33 Battye, *Western Australia*, ch. 11.
- 34 WALCV&P, 1910-11, Paper 11: Royal Commission on The Establishment of a University.
- 35 T.H. Bath, cited by Alexander, *Campus at Crawley*, p.70.
- 36 WAPD, vol. 19, p.1048.
- 37 Alexander, *Campus at Crawley*, pp.71-73.
- 38 W. B. Yeats, 'To a wealthy man...', *Collected Poems*, 2nd edn., London, 1950, pp.119-20.
- 39 Hackett to Deakin, 30 August, 1912, Deakin Papers, NLA MSS 1540, cited by Alexander, *Campus at Crawley*, p.74.
- 40 *West Australian*, 22 and 26 February, 1916.